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Citation for final published version:

Prendergast, Amy 2017. Book Review - Melanie Bigold, Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century: Elizabeth Rowe, Catherine Cockburn, and Elizabeth Carter (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780-1840 (22) , pp. 136-138. 10.18573/j.2017.10161 file

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18573/j.2017.10161>  
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.18573/j.2017.10161>>

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# ROMANTIC TEXTUALITIES

LITERATURE AND PRINT CULTURE, 1780–1840



ISSN 1748-0116

ISSUE 22

SPRING 2017



◆ SPECIAL ISSUE : FOUR NATIONS FICTION BY WOMEN, 1789–1830 ◆

[www.romtext.org.uk](http://www.romtext.org.uk)

◆ CARDIFF UNIVERSITY PRESS ◆

***Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780–1840*, 22 (Spring 2017)**

Available online at <[www.romtext.org.uk/](http://www.romtext.org.uk/)>; archive of record at  
<<https://publications.cardiffuniversitypress.org/index.php/RomText>>.

**Journal DOI:** 10.18573/ISSN.1748-0116 ♦ **Issue DOI:** 10.18573/n.2017.10148

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**Aims and Scope:** Formerly *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text* (1997–2005), *Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780–1840* is an online journal that is committed to foregrounding innovative Romantic-studies research into bibliography, book history, intertextuality and textual studies. To this end, we publish material in a number of formats: among them, peer-reviewed articles, reports on individual/group research projects, bibliographical checklists and biographical profiles of overlooked Romantic writers. *Romantic Textualities* also carries reviews of books that reflect the growing academic interest in the fields of book history, print culture, intertextuality and cultural materialism, as they relate to Romantic studies.



Melanie Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century: Elizabeth Rowe, Catherine Cockburn, and Elizabeth Carter* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 312pp. ISBN 978-1137033567; £55 (hb).

DESPITE THE WIDESPREAD ESPOUSAL OF PRINT CULTURE during the eighteenth century, manuscript circulation continued to be embraced by many writers as a viable and indeed attractive option. Several participants in literary salons across Britain and Ireland, for example, often chose to deliberately disseminate their writing in this form, and much salon correspondence includes discussion of the various merits and implications of such circulation. Acclaimed work on manuscript publication has been conducted since the late 1980s by Margaret Ezell, while Pam Perkins has recently argued, in relation to Scottish writers, that by shifting focus away from print (and individual authorship) we can gain 'a clearer sense of the cultural roles played by eighteenth-century women'.<sup>1</sup> Melanie Bigold's *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century* offers us this clearer understanding, presenting the reader with three fine, well-chosen case studies to illustrate her various arguments.

*Women of Letters* explores the works of Elizabeth Rowe, Catherine Cockburn and Elizabeth Carter, dedicating two chapters to each writer. The book's preface is clear and useful, immediately engaging the reader and carefully delineating the author's various arguments and aims. In addition to Bigold's central theme regarding manuscript circulation, her work is also very persuasive in its engagement with reception history and its efforts to convince us of her chosen authors' significant involvement in the republic of letters, outlining their contributions to various Enlightenment debates. One of the key strengths of Bigold's work is that she offers the reader a more inclusive literary history, providing extensive evidence for a more varied female literary tradition. Early on, Bigold outlines her wish to include women often overlooked in twentieth-century studies. Celebrated in their day for piety, virtue and learning, Rowe, Cockburn and Carter later became neglected, in part due to their chosen subjects, although Carter has experienced significant recent attention due to growing interest in the Bluestockings.

A key element of the work, and one that makes it much more effective, is that it does not simply exclude consideration of print to emphasise manuscript, but rather 'actively explores the interface of the two mediums' (p. xiii). Bigold is quick to signal that the three authors she has chosen are not anxious about print, but instead use different media for various purposes at different moments in their writing lives. The texts chosen for analysis by Bigold are well-balanced offerings of print and manuscript publication and come with very useful summaries. Bigold has undertaken solid archival work, mostly conducted in the Bodleian library and British Library, but also makes good use of online databases, particularly *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* and the *English Short Title Catalogue*, a fact that is clearly signalled throughout, rather than relegated to footnotes. Letter writing is presented to the reader as a valid subject for textual criticism,

and Bigold's engagement with these 'meritorious literary products' is extremely rewarding and informative (p. xiv). Her exploration of Elizabeth Rowe's *Friendship in death, in Twenty Letters from the Dead to the Living* (1728) and *Letters Moral and Entertaining, in Prose and Verse* (1729, 1731, 1733) is particularly satisfying, and features sustained discussion of their epistolary genesis, outlining thematic and stylistic continuities between the printed letters and those contained in the letter book of one of Rowe's primary correspondents.

Throughout the book, Bigold meticulously situates her three writers and their writing in their cultural contexts, while the reader is also presented with carefully balanced biographical detail, which supports rather than detracts from the author's arguments. Rowe is placed at the centre of a 'community of writers' interested in religious devotion and ethical philosophy, while Catharine Cockburn is introduced as the 'foremost female philosopher of England's Enlightenment' (p. 145). In a section entitled 'Did women have an Enlightenment?' Bigold responds with a resounding yes. The author makes an impassioned case for the intellectual importance of Cockburn's writing: her interest in reforming education, her role in 'clerical Enlightenment', and her influence on later thinkers, are all proffered as evidence, as Bigold argues that Cockburn participated and shaped Enlightenment thought rather than just benefiting from the writings of others.

As the title indicates, literary afterlives represent another central topic of consideration and this is very useful for those of us who often engage with the (heavily) edited letters of Elizabeth Carter or indeed the 'Queen of the Bluestockings', Elizabeth Montagu. Close attention is given to the print afterlives of these women through their biographies and posthumous collections of letters. The accounts of women's own agency in shaping their literary reception is an additional highlight of the book, as Bigold challenges the common disparagement directed at the women's male biographers, including Mathew Pennington's construction of his aunt Carter. Bigold charts the attempts by all three authors to shape and develop their own personas during their lifetime, detailing Rowe's crafting of a voice and her insistent self styling, Cockburn's complicity in the creation of the image of the retiring scholarly author, and Carter's 'construction of a writing self' (p. 176). She also makes convincing arguments for these authors' control over their posthumous reception. Elizabeth Carter in particular is presented as someone especially concerned with this and Bigold describes her as having 'lived for posterity' (p. 170).

Bigold's work defies any possible misconceptions of manuscript writing as 'unfinished, marginal and tenuous' and instead displays its merits, and reveals the benefits to be gained when one engages with both print and manuscript (p. 103). Bigold's writing style is engaging throughout, and the author's enthusiasm for her topic is evident, such as in the notes of excitement regarding Cockburn's links with Mlle de la Vallière. *Women of Letters* is valuable reading for those interested in the eighteenth century, women's writing, biography, Enlightenment, book history and print culture. The work is an excellent contribution to literary studies and offers

us a clearer understanding of the female literary tradition: one less restrictive and ultimately much more interesting. 

## NOTES

1. Pam Perkins, 'Enlightenment Culture', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. by Glenda Norquay (Edinburgh: EUP, 2012), p. 47.

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<<https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2017.10161>>

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Date of acceptance: 30 March 2016.



Daniel Cook and Nicholas Seager (eds), *The Afterlives of Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 316pp. ISBN 978-1-1070-5468-4; £67 (hb).

IN APRIL 2016, a research network dedicated to Authorship and Appropriation was inaugurated during an international conference on the subject at the University of Dundee, where not coincidentally this present volume was also launched. Cook and Seager are leading figures in this initiative, and their collection of essays exemplifies the aims of the network in that it seeks to facilitate scholarship on adaptation by accommodating '[i]n addition to issues of genre, authorship, audience, and influence', also 'afterlives in terms of remediation: the textual (poetry, prose, and playtexts), the performative (film, opera, and theatre), and the visual (caricatures, illustrations, and photographs)' (p. 3). This excellent collection is notable for the range of research interests that it covers and should manage to convince many scholars who do not normally read each other's work that they are all active in one overarching discipline, namely the diverse study of adaptation.

As an alternative to 'adaptation', which because of its overfamiliarity is arguably now too much taken for granted, the metaphor 'afterlife' is repeatedly invoked in order to call attention to 'the *mutual* relations between "versions" of works' (p. 2; my emphasis) without prioritising versions by historical precedence or hierarchies of prestige for their respective genres. The editors and all contributors start from the principle that every adaptation is to some extent an adoption too, and should not only be considered as a citation but also as an autonomous work in its own right. To study adaptations as afterlives is to give equal scrutiny to the older version and the new, taking into account the particular contingencies of genre and publication or performance context for both. This approach, as is acknowledged,

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**Nicola Lloyd** is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at Bath Spa University. She specializes in fiction of the Romantic period, with a particular focus on the Irish national tale and the interactions between Romanticism and Enlightenment. Her doctoral thesis, which she is currently preparing for publication, considered the influence of Enlightenment discourses of moral philosophy and perception on Romantic-period fiction. Nicky has published articles on the Irish novelist Lady Morgan and is one of the authors of *The Palgrave History Gothic Publishing: The Business of Gothic Fiction, 1764–1835*, due for completion in 2017. She is currently preparing a scholarly edition of Mary Julia Young's gothic-national tale *Donalda; or, the Witches of Glenshiel* (1805).

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